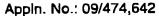Appln. No.: 09/474,642
Amdt. Dated October 14, 2003
Reply to Office Action dated July 15, 2003

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1.   (currently amended)   A method for facilitating refunds in a postage metering system, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving at a computer a request for a refund of a postage amount, the request being associated with a postage meter;

using the computer for accessing a dispute account database for identifying a dispute account having a value therein that is indicative of a level of refund activity attributable to the postage meter, the dispute account being associated with the request;

determining, via the computer, if a̲t̲h̲e̲ value in the dispute account is acceptable for permitting a refund of the postage amount; and

at times when the value is determined to be acceptable for permitting the refund of the postage amount, refunding the postage amount to a user of the postage meter.

2.   (original)   A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising sending enabling data from the computer to the postage meter, the enabling data useable by the postage meter to add the postage amount to a vault of the postage meter to effectuate the refunding of the postage amount.

3.   (original)   A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising adjusting the value in
the dispute account to account for the postage amount refunded.

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4. (original) A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising sending funds equivalent to the postage amount to a user identified account thereby effectuating the refunding of the postage amount.

5. (original) A method as recited in claim 1 further comprising mailing funds equivalent to the postage amount to the user thereby effectuating the refunding of the postage amount.

6. (original) A method as recited in claim 1, wherein at times when the value is determined to be not acceptable, sending a message for one of printing and display at the postage meter, the message advising that the request for a refund has been denied.

7. (currently amended) A postage metering system comprising:
a postage meter having a vault that accounts for postage dispensed by the postage meter and a processor for controlling operation of the postage meter;
a data center in communication with the postage meter, the data center having a central processing unit and a dispute account database, the dispute account database having a dispute account having a value therein that is indicative of a level of refund activity attributable to the postage meter, the dispute account being associated with the postage meter;
means for permitting communication between the postage meter and the data center;
wherein at times when the data center receives a request for a refund of a postage amount for the postage meter the central processing unit determines if athe value in the dispute account is acceptable for permitting a refund of the postage amount and if it is the central processing unit initiates the refunding of the postage amount to a user of the postage meter.

8.   (previously presented)   A postage meter system as recited in claim 7, wherein the central processing unit refunds the postage amount to the user by sending enabling data useable by the processor for adding the postage amount to the postage meter vault.

9.   (previously presented)   A postage metering system as recited in claim 8, wherein the postage meter further includes a printing device that prints a receipt of the postage amount refunded.

10.   (original)   A computer-readable medium having computer-executable code for performing the steps of claim 1.

11.   (previously presented)   A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising sending the request from the postage meter to the computer.

12.   (previously presented)   A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the postage meter is remotely located from the computer.

13.   (previously presented)   A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising maintaining a transaction record of the refunding at the computer.

14.   (previously presented)   A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the postage amount correlates to a postage value previously dispensed by the postage meter.

15. (previously presented) A postage metering system as recited in claim 7, wherein the postage meter sends the request to the data center and the postage amount correlates to a postage value previously dispensed by the postage meter.

16. (previously presented) A postage metering system as recited in claim 7, wherein the postage meter is remotely located from the data center.

17. (currently amended) A method for facilitating refunds in a postage meter, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving at the postage meter a request for a refund of a postage amount;

accessing a dispute account in the postage meter to determine if a value in the dispute account is acceptable for permitting a refund of the postage amount, the value indicative of a level of refund activity attributable to the postage meter; and

at times when the value is determined to be acceptable for permitting the refund of the postage amount, refunding the postage amount to a user of the postage meter.

18. (previously presented) A method as recited in claim 17, further comprising refunding the postage amount by adding the postage amount to a vault of the postage meter.

19. (previously presented) A method as recited in claim 17, wherein at times when the postage meter communicates with a remote data center sending a message from the postage meter to the data center to initiate the refunding of the postage amount to the user.

20. (currently amended) A postage meter comprising:

a processor that controls operation of the postage meter;

a vault that accounts for postage dispensed by the postage meter;

a dispute account having a value therein, the value indicative of a level of refund activity attributable to the meter;

wherein at times when the postage meter receives a request for a refund of a postage amount the processor determines if the value in the dispute account is acceptable for permitting a refund of the postage amount and if it is the processor initiates the refunding of the postage amount to a user of the postage meter.

21. (previously presented) A postage meter as recited in claim 20, wherein the processor refunds the postage amount by adding the postage amount to the vault.